

Constructing A Lively Community in the Midst of Oppression:
Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada During WWII

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HIST 4581

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April 6, 2021

Erwin Schild had been imprisoned in Dachau Concentration Camp in Germany in 1938 and was later permitted into Britain where he was interned and subsequently sent to internment overseas in Canada.¹ Schild, who later became the rabbi for Adath Israel Congregation located in Toronto, wrote about his experiences which is evident from his fourth book titled *The Crazy Angel*. In his book, Schild offered readers an outlook on Canadian internment which he regarded as “A Canadian Footnote to the Holocaust.”² His internment experiences on Canadian soil were

... dwarfed by the Holocaust [in Europe itself] and therefore remained relatively unknown, and yet it is related to the Holocaust as a footnote to a text. It could only have happened at that time, and only in a world that allowed the Holocaust to happen. It could have happened only because anti-Semitism was widespread, and because the world did not bother to understand Jews.³

Schild’s perspective on Canada’s treatment of Jews during this time in history was particularly interesting considering that while the Canadian army, including Jewish soldiers, fought against Nazism in Europe, Jewish refugees who fled Nazi persecution were interned in camps across Canada. Of course, in the years leading up to World War II, Canada’s federal government had implemented anti-Semitic and illiberal policies that most certainly harmed Jews. Canada’s restrictive immigration policies were negligent as the nation essentially acted as a bystander, refusing to provide a safe haven to Jewish refugees who were persecuted by the Nazi regime even though newspapers that detailed the attacks against German Jews were being circulated.⁴ This negligence is evident from the refusal of the M.S. St. Louis, the decision of various nations made at the Evian Conference, which “in the eyes of the Nazis, the world had given them carte blanche to solve their Jewish problem – their way,” and from the fact that Canada only permitted

¹ Schild, Erwin. *The Crazy Angel* (Toronto: Adath Israel Congregation, 2017), 96-97.

² *Ibid.*, 116

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Irving Abella and Harold Troper, “‘The line must be drawn somewhere’: Canada and Jewish Refugees, 1933-39,” *Canadian Historical Review* 60, no.2 (1979), 179, 182, 183 & 208.

4,000 Jews into the nation between 1933-1939, a number *significantly* lower when compared to other countries during this time.⁵ Schild's claim that the internment of Jewish refugees "could only have happened" during this time in Canadian history, in a world that idly stood by and *chose* not to act, "in a world that allowed the Holocaust to happen,"⁶ reveals the convictions about his wartime experiences that he later wrote.

During the Second World War, Canada's federal government utilized the War Measures Act to set into motion the internment of thousands of individuals deemed to be "enemy subjects."⁷ Internees included "enemy aliens" from various ethnic groups, including Germans, Japanese and Italians, as well as Canadian citizens, specifically those affiliated with communist and fascist organizations. A substantial amount of research about this event has been published. Yet, Schild has contested the notion that Jewish internment in Canada is well-known to the public. "It is a pity," he wrote, "that so few Canadians, even Jewish Canadians know the fantastic story of about 2,300 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria who were interned in Canada for up to three years during the Second World War."⁸ Newspapers, archive documents, oral testimonies by ex-internees, and memoirs reveal that the internment of Jewish refugees in Canada from 1940 to 1943 provided a curious opportunity for community building, organizational mobilization and solidarity. Jewish internees, in the face of oppression, created lively, cultural and supportive camp communities, making the best of the time that they were interned within Canada. Amidst the strange and ambivalent situation of internment, Jewish internees, through their resilience, turned what was meant to be a negative experience into a

⁵ Ibid., 179, 181 & 196.

⁶ Schild, *The Crazy Angel*, 116.

⁷ Martin Auger. *Prisoners of the Home Front: German POWs and "Enemy Aliens" in Southern Quebec, 1940-1946*. (Vancouver, CA: UBC Press, 2005), 3.

⁸ Schild, 96.

positive opportunity; friendship, unity, eventual naturalization during a period of restrictive immigration, and perseverance of academics, religion and culture. These communities were formed through the refugees' resistance to the humiliations of internment, their religious persistence, intellectual determination, and comradeship. Interned Jews formed communal solidarity not only inside the camps themselves. Jewish organizations *beyond* the barbed wires aided the internees and petitioned the state and the military for their release. Jewish communal agencies also provided the means needed to enable the Jewish refugees to make the best of their difficult situation.

Following the Fall of France in 1940, Britain's government decided to round up every "alien" within England, the majority of whom were Jewish refugees who had fled Nazi persecution.⁹ Britain interned them.¹⁰ According to Edgar S, an ex-internee, Britain was not able to comprehend German triumph and suspected that Germany could have only been successful through the use of fifth columnists.¹¹ Suspicion was particularly directed towards those who were born in either Germany or Austria as well as those who settled in England when the attacks on the Low Countries commenced.¹² Germany was known to have spies infiltrate the civilians, especially in Belgium, France and Holland.¹³ The idea of being infiltrated by spies, who would gather and report information to enhance the German cause, created hysteria.¹⁴ When Britain believed that fifth columnists were associated amongst the refugees, they were immediately

⁹ "Cody Explains Alien Stand of University: Only Nine Take Courses and Are Well Sponsored," Maritime Critics Told. *The Globe and Mail*; Feb 4, 1943; pg. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ It is important to note that the identity of certain individuals will remain anonymous, and therefore their first name and only the first initial of their last name will be used to refer to them. Oral testimony, interview of Edgar S., interviewed by Renata Skotnicka Zajdman and Paula Bultz, Montreal 1994; part of McGill University's Living Testimonies, Collection, identifier: LT-88.

¹² J.V. McAree, Fair Play Demanded For German Refugees. *The Globe and Mail*; Aug 9, 1940; pg. 6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

interned.¹⁵ This animosity towards Jews was developed from the treachery and sabotage that they were associated with from World War I, as they were blamed for the defeat of their Nation-State. Overall, as quoted from “Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust,” by William Brustein and Ryan King, “the scapegoat theory holds that in times of significant national trauma, the host population has a tendency to blame minorities for its misfortunes,” evident in Germany’s treatment of its Jewish population following the Great War, and consequently, during World War II.¹⁶ However, while these German refugees were accused of aiding the Nazis, “not one shred of evidence” surfaced against them, according to historian Paula Draper.¹⁷ This lack of evidence reinforces the innocence of these Jewish refugees, especially when considering that the majority of these refugees were Jewish scapegoats, victims of Nazi aggression. Yet, the absurd notion that Jews would have worked for their tormentors seems not to have influenced the British authorities responsible for interning Germans. According to Josef Eisinger’s memoir *Flight and Refuge: Reminiscences of a Motley Youth*, internment was implemented against everyone with a German passport.¹⁸ To make matters worse, there were no efforts made to differentiate between those who were anti-Nazi, such as Jews and political refugees, from those who may have actually posed a threat to Britain. According to a news article printed in Canada’s *Globe and Mail* from November 4, 1941,

The [British] Government knew as well as any of its critics that among these people were to be found men and women who would give their lives to bring about Hitler’s defeat, and that they would prove loyal to Great Britain in any test. But there was no time to select the genuine victims of Hitlerism from the spies and saboteurs whom he had planted in England.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ William I. Brustein, and Ryan D. King. “Anti-Semitism in Europe before the Holocaust.” *International political science review* 25, no. 1 (2004), 48.

¹⁷ Paula Jean Draper, “The Accidental Immigrants: Canada and the Interned Refugees,” PhD diss., (1983), 6.

¹⁸ Josef Eisinger. *Flight and Refuge: Reminiscences of a Motley Youth* (New York: Josef Eisinger, 2016), 63.

¹⁹ J.V. McAree, Talents Languishing In Refugee Camps. *The Globe and Mail (1936-2017); Nov 4, 1941*; pg. 6.

Britain, fully aware that amongst those interned were innocent refugees who wanted nothing more than the defeat of Hitler and the Nazi Party, nevertheless interned Germans indiscriminately.²⁰ Moreover, this was done irrespective of the fact that according to the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, German Jews had been stripped of their German citizenship: “Jews lost their citizenship in Germany, their passports were marked with a huge black ‘J’ and the slow squeeze tightened.”²¹

While the Jewish refugees were initially interned in Britain, they were eventually sent to internment in Canada. During a radio show series on 7 April 1950, titled “Profile of Your Neighbour” by Jeann Beattie, Rabbi Albert Pappenheim, an ex-internee, was the subject of discussion.²² As discussed during the show, eventually the thousands of internees became a burden to England as she was no longer capable of providing the means to feed and care for them.²³ Consequently, Britain’s dominions Canada and Australia, were asked to take custody of the prisoners of war and dangerous enemy aliens, which they eventually did.²⁴ While Britain warned that the dominions would receive thousands of prisoners who were “dangerous... requiring stringent confinement,” in reality, Britain sent these prisoners along with thousands of innocent refugees.²⁵ The British Home Office informed Ottawa that different classes of internees were being sent over, that the War Office did not distinguish between the different classes, and that they treated them all the same.²⁶ Nonetheless, as Ian Darragh noted in his foreword to

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Radio Show Interview “Profile of Your Neighbour #2 Rabbi Albert Pappenheim,” page one, April 7, 1950. Pappenheim fonds F113_s5_f1_i032_1950-59, Ontario Jewish Archive, Toronto.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., page two.

²⁴ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar S., interviewed by Renata Skotnicka Zajdman and Paula Bultz, Montreal 1994; part of McGill University’s Living Testimonies, Collection, identifier: LT-88

²⁵ Ian Darragh, “Foreword” in *Blatant Injustice: The Story of a Jewish Refugee from Nazi Germany Imprisoned in Britain and Canada during World War II* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), xiii.

²⁶ Ibid.

Walter Igersheimer's first person account *Blatant Injustice: The Story of a Jewish Refugee from Nazi Germany Imprisoned in Britain and Canada During World War II*, "Canadian authorities probably had no idea what these different categories referred to, and in any case the message erroneously concluded that there was no difference... [which] created a problem that would take years to sort out."²⁷ As Leo K's testimony, another ex-internee, suggested, he and the other internees were not informed about where they were being shipped.²⁸ Nevertheless, three ships carrying almost 2,300 civilian male internees, ranged between sixteen to sixty years old, arrived in Canada during the summer of 1940.²⁹ Ultimately, internees were gradually released and by 1944, 966 anti-Nazi refugees were free, as workers or students, within Canadian society.³⁰ They were not granted citizenship until the war's close.³¹

Different constituents in Canada knew different information about the internees and their status. High level officials within Canada's federal government most certainly knew that many refugees had been interned within the country and that government officials *chose* not to distinguish between enemies and refugees until it became absolutely necessary to do so.³² Rather than do the right thing and differentiate these men after Britain failed to do so, Canada chose to pass the responsibility and blame onto Britain, as the nation was doing what it was asked to which was simply "guarding those sent," according to historian Paula Draper.³³ According to Edgar L's testimony, Canada's citizenry was aware of the fact that prisoners of war were being

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Oral testimony, interview of Leo K., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2007; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-516.

²⁹ Paula Draper. "The Accidental Immigrants," 2 & 11

³⁰ Draper, "The Accidental Immigrants," 3.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Paula Draper, "Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada, 1940-43" in *Civilian Internment in Canada: Histories and Legacies*, ed. Rhonda Hithner and Jim Mochoruk (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2020), 316.

³³ Ibid.

sent to the country.³⁴ Edgar L discussed how the public shouted, cursed, spit and threw stones at the internees while they were on their way to the camp located in Trois-Rivières, unaware that innocent refugees were also sent over.³⁵ Unlike government officials, military officers running the internment camps were uninformed that they should have expected men other than prisoners of war.³⁶ However, this is not to say that they did not eventually realize this colossal blunder, especially considering that they were met by Orthodox Jews who asked that they be served kosher food.³⁷ In fact, from Edgar L's testimony, we are informed that some guards caught on very quickly.³⁸ He spoke of how one guard in particular, after seeing young boys around the age of sixteen, knew that they posed no threat and as a result the guard turned in the other direction and shed tears, clearly expressing the sympathy he had towards them.³⁹

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of why Jewish refugees in Canada were not recognized as refugees immediately following their arrival into the country, it is important to analyze the nation's attitudes and policies towards Jewish immigration. After being interned in Canada during the summer of 1940 as enemy aliens, the status of the Jewish refugees did not change to "interned refugees" until July 1, 1941.⁴⁰ The Canadian government's reluctance to officially reclassify these men likely had to do with a larger issue at hand, namely, immigration. Frederick Blair, Canada's director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, was "the head of immigration in the Mackenzie King administration" and "at the

³⁴ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar L., interviewed by Rhona Vandelman, Montreal, 2012; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-471.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Draper, "Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada, 1940-43," 316.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar L., interviewed by Rhona Vandelman, Montreal, 2012; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-471.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Schild, 112.

heart of the closed-door policy.”⁴¹ He was accountable for deciding if these internees should be permitted into Canadian society as immigrants.⁴² Blair believed it was his “patriotic duty” to do everything he could to prevent and delay Jewish immigration.⁴³ Mackenzie King and Blair were just two of the players involved in Canada’s apparatus of restriction, albeit the most significant players. Their outlooks and attitudes towards immigration were shared by others including Vincent Massey and Ernest Lapointe.⁴⁴ Canada’s immigration restrictions towards minorities, especially Jews, had already been a common practice by this time. The nation already refused Jewish refugees and now Canada and its federal officials “were determined not to let Jews gain entry through the back door of internment.”⁴⁵ This attitude was also reflected by the camps’ high level officers, as Schild, Leo K and Joseph L all spoke of how a camp administrator, stated that ““The only way you will stay in Canada is six feet under the ground.””⁴⁶

While Joseph L was at the New Brunswick camp, he recalled a doctor from Vienna who tried to boost his spirit as he noticed Joseph’s depression.⁴⁷ The doctor asked Joseph why he was depressed, and suggested he had nothing to worry about.⁴⁸ This doctor told him that he did not have to worry about rent, food or other responsibilities, and that they were surrounded by forest and fresh air, a lifestyle that people pay for.⁴⁹ Joseph remembered the doctor telling him to enjoy

⁴¹ “Jews Not Welcome in Wartime Canada - CBC Archives,” CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, October 6, 1982), <https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/auschwitz-jews-not-welcome-in-wartime-canada>.

⁴² Darragh, “Foreword” in *Blatant Injustice: The Story of a Jewish Refugee from Nazi Germany Imprisoned in Britain and Canada during World War II*, xiv.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Abella & Troper, “‘The line must be drawn somewhere’: Canada and Jewish Refugees, 1933-39,” 189, 200, 203 & 204.

⁴⁵ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 316.

⁴⁶ Schild, 113. See also; Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450 and Oral testimony, interview of Leo K., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2007; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-516.

⁴⁷ Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the situation while it lasts.⁵⁰ This is certainly an interesting perspective on internment, especially considering that many Jewish internees were pleased to have been shipped to Canada, because it meant that they were far from Germany and the imminent threat the Fatherland posed to England.⁵¹ Not only did internment in Canada provide Jewish refugees safety from the European theatre of war, it also eventually led to the naturalization of nearly one thousand internees.⁵² However, as Schild acknowledged, “a comfortable prison is still a prison,” and these men who had their freedom taken from them suffered for it.⁵³ The psychological toll of their internment was significant, for they were interned and treated as an enemy by countries who were their allies.⁵⁴ Since these men were innocent civilians interned by their own ally, and that “these Jews were actually treated worse than avowed Nazis and captured German officers” who actually posed a threat to the Allied powers, justified the bitter feelings developed towards Canada.⁵⁵ Considering the situation that these Jewish refugees had been forced in, amidst the face of oppression, these men created lively, cultural and supportive camp communities, making the best of their situation. Such an experience enabled men like Eisinger to describe his time in internment as “a most enriching experience,” though not everyone felt this way.⁵⁶

A significant aspect of community amongst the Jewish internees was resistance against their internment itself. According to Draper, “through democratically elected spokesmen, the refugees presented memoranda, petitions, and appeals to the administration and outside organizations. When camp conditions became intolerable, they resorted to strikes, disobedience,

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Eric Koch. *Deemed Suspect: A Wartime Blunder* (Halifax, N.S.: Goodread Biographies, 1985), 39.

⁵² Ibid., xiii.

⁵³ Schild, 111.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 117

⁵⁵ Darraugh, “Foreward” in *Blatant Injustice*, vii.

⁵⁶ Eisinger. *Flight and Refuge*, 73.

and general insubordination.”⁵⁷ Ex-internees’ writings and testimonies on their experiences attested to these acts of resistance within the camps. Edgar S spoke of how he and his fellow internees wanted to assert that they were not soldiers, and in order to do this they would not march nor stand at attention.⁵⁸ In regards to the roll calls made daily, Joseph L detailed that they were taken by calling out numbers rather than the men’s names.⁵⁹ However, there was one instance where names were called out, and this was because one of the internees, who was known for being “a big joker,” was curious to know what would happen if he was not present for attendance.⁶⁰ His decision to disregard roll call led to disruption, as its caused attendance to be repeatedly taken, and for the camps’ alarms to sound.⁶¹ From these two instances, it is evident that the internees were not compliant but rather resisted against orders.

Jewish internees were granted certain privileges once restrictions eased after their status was officially changed to interned *refugees*. Before their status was appropriately changed, however, the men were subject to strict policies and limitations which led to strikes. The men opposed their prisoner of war status.⁶² Eisinger discussed that while he was in a camp located within the town of Farnham, rather than being secluded and away from the public like another camp he was at previously, the men sought to garner the attention of the public to protest their status.⁶³ To do this, the men displayed a sign on one of the huts’ roofs which broadcasted that they were anti-Nazi.⁶⁴ The internees also protested against the demeaning prisoner uniform they

⁵⁷ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 317.

⁵⁸ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar S., interviewed by Renata Skotnicka Zajdman and Paula Bultz, Montreal 1994; part of McGill University’s Living Testimonies, Collection, identifier: LT-88.

⁵⁹ Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Eisinger, 77.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

were forced to wear instead of their own civilian clothes, which certainly would have suited them better considering that is all they were. Joseph L spoke of how they were given underwear, shirts, boots, pants and a jacket, which had a large red circle on the back, to wear.⁶⁵ In a protest, some internees wore civilian clothes underneath their uniform.⁶⁶ These men were caught however, and were consequently put in the camp's jail.⁶⁷ From Eisinger's memoir, it is evident that punishment did not only result in being separated from the others and being sent to the camps' jail. Accordingly, in response to work strikes, seven "troublemakers" were removed from Eisinger's camp and were relocated to another.⁶⁸ Therefore, many of the internees went on a three-day hunger strike to protest the relocation of their fellow captives before their efforts were put down through extortion.⁶⁹

These acts of resistance helped internees form their community; they were experienced as self-evident indicators of resilience. These men knew that they did not belong within these barbed wire camps, nor did they deserve to be deprived of their freedom and be bound by restrictions. Rather than accept their conditions in the face of oppression, the men worked *together* towards a common goal, "there was a *united* struggle to secure decent living conditions and release" [emphasis added].⁷⁰ Indeed, acts of resistance like the three-day hunger strike Eisinger recounted, seem to have actually enhanced Jewish internees' sense of community and purpose, as these men would act in solidarity and even overexert themselves to defend one another.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Eisinger, 80.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Draper, "Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada," 317.

⁷¹ Eisinger, 80.

Amidst the strange and negative situation, the Jewish refugees were forced in, they took multifaceted approaches to make the best of their situation. Joseph L reminisced on the fact that during the winter at the Île aux Noix camp in Quebec, the men would be permitted to skate and play hockey.⁷² While this may seem like a minimal detail into their camp experience, it is certainly important as it showcases that these men were able to enjoy some fun and entertainment amongst themselves. It is an important attempt to enjoy the good in their captive situation. In addition to these forms of entertainment, internees, through religious persistence, intellectual determination, and comradeship, made the best of the time that they were interned within Canada. After all, as this essay will now analyze,

not only did they “continue their own studies but [they] set up study opportunities for others. There was religious worship daily, and joyous celebrations of the festivals. Some students and also nonstudents studies, taught and followed the high standards of Jewish interpersonal ethics, *and elevated what could have been a rough prison lifestyle by means of their gentle and unselfish deportment*” [Emphasis added]⁷³

Not every Jewish internee followed in accordance to religious observances, as Schild described New Brunswick’s camp the majority of internees did not practice Shabbat and Kashrut and therefore ate non-kosher foods.⁷⁴ On the other hand, there were Jewish internees who would not eat anything other than kosher food.⁷⁵ There was a diversity of adherence to religious observances amongst these men. Nevertheless, as Schild put it, “the kosher group...soon developed into a real Jewish community, almost a miniature of the Jewish world.”⁷⁶ They arranged Torah and Talmud classes for the Yeshiva students as well as the other internees.⁷⁷ Additionally, they observed the Sabbath and other Holy Days, and celebrated festivals and

⁷² Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450.

⁷³ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 320-321

⁷⁴ Schild, 109.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 110.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

holidays such as Chanukah and Purim.⁷⁸

Two religious events stand out from the testimonies of two ex-internees, as they are truly unique to the experience of internment in Canada. The first is described by Edgar L. For Orthodox Jews, it is customary to observe the Sabbath in an enclosed space, made by an eruv.⁷⁹ To enclose the camp, internees bought wire from a commander and asked that he nail it to the camp's main gate.⁸⁰ Come Sunday, they sold it back to the commander.⁸¹ This is significant as it not only highlights the extent to which the community went to observe its rituals, upholding practices to the degree that they would have had they not been in internment, but also because it shows the cooperation of the camp commander. According to Edgar L, while this request may have seemed strange to the commander, "he went along with it because it was harmless."⁸² The second event is described by Leo K. He spoke of how the internees organized a "religious service for the victory of the allied armies," and asked that the officers join in.⁸³ As Leo recalled it, because he and his fellow Jewish refugees were regarded as prisoners of war, this religious service was an important gesture to inculcate how much *more* the war impacted them as Jews.⁸⁴

Similar to their religious persistence, the Jewish refugee internees were also determined to continue their education. Though not every refugee pursued this route, those who did had three options; academic, technical, and religious.⁸⁵ As Joseph L recalled, there were many

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar L., interviewed by Leah Jacob and Matthew MacDonald, Montreal 2009; part of the Life Stories of Montrealers Displaced by War, Genocide, and Other Human Rights Violations project of Concordia University (Holocaust and Other Persecutions Against Jews Working Group), identifier: MLS-05-LIOE.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Oral testimony, interview of Leo K., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2007; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-516.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Draper, "The Accidental Immigrants," 285.

professors and academic personnel among the internees.⁸⁶ One 1941 newspaper noted that among the friendly aliens within Canadian internment

are thirty-four doctors and dentists, many of them highly qualified men with degrees from Cambridge, Oxford, Edinburgh or Glasgow, as well as Continental medical schools or universities. “There are artists, architects, scientists, engineers, lawyers, priests, research workers, biologists, chemists, students and skilled workers of all kinds,” said Colonel Fordham.⁸⁷

These men played significant roles within the camps as many of them either made things in the camps or educated the other internees.⁸⁸ Edgar L mentioned that he himself taught three subjects: algebra, geometry and descriptive geometry, which is a subject useful to architects.⁸⁹

In his memoir, *Blatant Injustice: The Story of a Jewish Refugee From Nazi Germany Imprisoned in Britain and Canada During World War II*, Walter Igersheimer provides a different perspective on internment as he speaks from the position of an internee “who received “ordinary” treatment.”⁹⁰ Igersheimer spoke of how the camps essentially had a hierarchy and that educated internees “received special treatment.”⁹¹ This difference in treatment is evident in various instances, for example, before they were eventually forced to contribute to the work efforts every day within the camps, students were not expected to work as often and only worked certain jobs.⁹² Being a student also meant to be amongst the first to be released from internment, to quote Draper, “the first releases were granted to the most promising students and those skilled technicians urgently needed by Canada’s war industries.”⁹³ The privileges of being a student was

⁸⁶ Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450

⁸⁷ Gladys Arnold. “Internees’ Work Boosts Canadian Gun Output.” *The Globe and Mail* (1936-2017); Oct 3, 1941; pg. 17.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar L., interviewed by Rhona Vandelman, Montreal, 2012; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-471.

⁹⁰ Darraugh, “Foreward” in *Blatant Injustice*, xxi.

⁹¹ Ibid., xxii.

⁹² Eisinger, 74 & 76.

⁹³ Draper, “The Accidental Immigrants,” 346.

reflected in a 1941 Memorandum by the Central Committee for Interned Refugees (CCIR), which detailed how fifty-five refugee students had already been released in order to pursue their studies at various post-secondary institutions, and that the total would soon grow to sixty-five with the potential for that number to grow after their release was officially approved.⁹⁴ Education certainly had a profound cultural impact on the internment experience of the Jewish refugees, however the difference in treatment sparks a question as to whether or not it created tension for those who received “ordinary” treatment.

While each reflection and perspective were distinct, it is quite fascinating to hear some of the ex-internees’ thoughts on internment and how it affected them. Ernest G stated that the “luckiest thing that ever happened to me” was internment, because it gave him the opportunity to attend McGill University, which drove his career.⁹⁵ To quote Eisinger’s thoughts on his internment:

I always looked on the time I spent behind barbed wire as a ‘good thing’ in my life...These months of internment not only set my life on a new course, they also let me feel at home with a wide range of humanity...We had time to talk, to read, to acquire new skills, and to make friendship – without being distracted by a job, a family, or women.⁹⁶

From these perspectives, while they were not the opinion of everyone and are not meant to overshadow the oppression these men encountered, they were really able to make the best of the situation they were in. As Schild acknowledged, these internees, who were later released into Canadian society, enhanced Canadian culture as well as the Canadian Jewish community.⁹⁷ Schild listed himself among several men who made significant contributions through their own

⁹⁴ Central Committee for Interned Refugees, Memorandum, From Mr. Saul Hayes to the Central Committee Officers, etc., 11 December 1941, i0062-Ad-2- “Memoranda, Internal-Book 1: Refugees”, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

⁹⁵ Oral testimony, interview of Ernest G., interviewed by Jerry Singer, Montreal, 1995; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-132.

⁹⁶ Eisinger, 81.

⁹⁷ Schild, 115.

professions, including Emil Fackenheim, Rabbi Albert Pappenheim, Eric Koch, Henry Kreisel and Helmut Kallmann.⁹⁸ Overall, their educational determination is an indicator of the refugees resilience, as eloquently written, “while imprisoned in Canada, the refugees started a free university, mounted plays, and wrote musicals. They did not let the authorities crush their creativity or desire for education.”⁹⁹

Comradery and solidarity were critical components within the internment experience. After an interviewer asked Leo K if the refugees felt solidarity with each other and if they felt as if they were a part of a brotherhood, he agreed.¹⁰⁰ The friendship shared between the refugees is reflected in Eisinger’s diary entry from 26 March, 1941. Eisinger wrote about how he enjoyed his birthday and how a party was arranged to celebrate the special day.¹⁰¹ He was given an apple cake, whipped cream, and presents including sweets, a pocket knife and socks.¹⁰² Thus, the community of interned Jewish refugees played a significant role in each other’s lives and in the enjoyment they experienced during such a difficult time. Their friendship meant so much more because in a time where they had been separated from their families, fellow internees became family.¹⁰³ Moreover, they were able to *relate* to one another.¹⁰⁴ Hence, several friendships formed within Canada’s internment camp grew to be lifelong friendships.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, in an attempt to shut out the experience of internment, some disbanded their friendships.¹⁰⁶

The relations that some internees, specifically Joseph L, formed with camp guards is also

⁹⁸ Ibid., 115-116

⁹⁹ Darragh, “Foreward” in *Blatant Injustice*, xxiv.

¹⁰⁰ Oral testimony, interview of Leo K., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2007; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-516.

¹⁰¹ Eisinger, 76.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 331.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Eisinger, 81.

¹⁰⁶ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 331.

noteworthy. Joseph spoke of two significant encounters with two different guards, which shed light on at least some of the relationships between guards and guarded, relations nothing short of wholesome. In the first instance, Joseph spoke of how the guard was remorseful, he joined the war effort with good intentions but did not agree with the fact that he was instructed to guard innocent people.¹⁰⁷ This guard asked that Joseph paint him something after he found out that Joseph was artistic.¹⁰⁸ So, the guard bought Joseph a watercolour set which he discreetly handed over to him, and from this, Joseph painted him a watchtower after providing himself with paper from the camp.¹⁰⁹ In the second instance, the guard could not read nor write.¹¹⁰ The guard shared this information with Joseph who in turn, helped the soldier to read and write letters.¹¹¹ The fact that the guard trusted Joseph enough to share and keep that information secret, and even obtain his help, reveals a lot about the relationship they had, which may have grown to be a friendship. Even though this was not the case for *all* guards, it is evident from these two instances with these two particular guards that some were pleasant and sympathetic to those who they were guarding. Therefore, some internees were supported not only by those interned within the camps, but those guarding within them. Support also came from beyond the camps barbed wires.

Representatives and Jewish organizations helped formulate the lively, cultural and supportive camp communities, by providing the means needed to enable the Jewish refugees to make the best of their situation. Many organizations, such as the YMCA and the Canadian National Committee for Refugees (CNCR), worked to improve the internment experience of the

¹⁰⁷ Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹¹ Ibid.

Jewish refugees.¹¹² Therefore, while the refugees were resisting their internment and worked towards their release, “they were not alone in the struggle. The Canadian Jewish community was represented in refugee matters by the United Jewish Refugee and War Relief Agencies (UJRA). An arm of the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), the UJRA was directed by a determined young Montreal lawyer, Saul Hayes.”¹¹³ Hayes worked diligently to help the internees’ cases, he was in constant communication with Blair whether it was to plead for their release so that they could pursue education,¹¹⁴ problem-solving any discrepancies encountered, and vouching for them.¹¹⁵ As acknowledged by Edgar S and Leo K’s testimonies, Senator Cairine Wilson was another important advocate of those interned.¹¹⁶ Family members reached out to people and organizations such as the UJRA¹¹⁷ and Senator Wilson,¹¹⁸ thereby exhibiting the trust and faith that those regarded them with, as they sought their help and guidance. While these are the main people and organizations who helped the refugees, in more ways than one, it is important to note that they are not the *only* ones. The following paragraphs will continue to take a look at just *some* of their efforts.

The visitation of these people and organizations were important to the internees as their presence relieved “the insult of incarceration.”¹¹⁹ Joseph L mentioned how a rabbi and a teacher

¹¹² Draper, “The Accidental Immigrants,” 103.

¹¹³ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 322.

¹¹⁴ See for example, Correspondence from Saul Hayes to Frederick Blair, 12 October 1941, UJRA-Bc-54-Eisinger, Joseph, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹¹⁵ See for example, Correspondence from Saul Hayes to Frederick Blair, 15 January 1943, UJRA, Bc Kutner, Hans file, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹¹⁶ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar S., interviewed by Renata Skotnicka Zajdman and Paula Bultz, Montreal 1994; part of McGill University’s Living Testimonies, Collection, identifier: LT-88, and Oral testimony, interview of Leo K., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2007; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-516.

¹¹⁷ See for example, Correspondence from Fred Oswald to the United Jewish Refugee & War Relief Agencies, 17 November 1940, UJRA Bc Kutner, Hans file, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹¹⁸ See for example, Correspondence from Fred Oswald to the Central Committee for Interned Refugees (Senator Wilson), 7 April 1941, UJRA Bc Kutner, Hans file, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹¹⁹ Draper, “Chapter 17: The Paradox of Survival: Jewish Refugees Interned in Canada,” 323.

came to visit the New Brunswick camp.¹²⁰ As Joseph recalled, their visit came after a hunger strike, which was sparked in retaliation of censorship.¹²¹ The rabbi spoke to the men, reassuring them that they are being thought of.¹²² Therefore, from this instance and others, it is these visitations that were crucial as they worked to uplift the men's spirits and help revive the energy and life within the camp.

These organizations provided the supplies needed to enable the refugees to thrive religiously and educationally, therefore fostering the camp communities and enabling the men to do the best with the time they were interned. For starters, according to Edgar L., the CJC organized kosher foods for the camps.¹²³ The Jewish Community Council of Montreal was a significant contributor, supplying the men with religious items which enabled them to conduct rituals and celebrations. In one correspondence from September 16, 1940 the Jewish Community Council asked that Major E.D.P. Kippen, of camp Île aux Noix, inform them of the articles that the internees may need considering the upcoming New Year's Holidays.¹²⁴ A few days later, Kippen wrote back after gathering a list of what the Orthodox and Liberal Jews, a total of 273 prisoners, sought.¹²⁵ To name a few of the many items requested, the list included; 200 prayer gowns, 273 Machsorim, 273 small white caps, ritual music, etc.¹²⁶ A few days passed before the Jewish Community Council responded to Kippen, thanking him for sending the list of requests to

¹²⁰ Oral testimony (session: 2008-08-07) interview of Joseph L., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2008; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-450.

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar L., interviewed by Rhona Vandelman, Montreal, 2012; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-471.

¹²⁴ Correspondence from the Jewish Community Council of Montreal to Major E.D.B. Kippen, 16 September 1940, CJC-ZA1940 Box 7, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal. (It is important to note that normally, there would be another number after the 7 [referring to the box number], denoting the file number, however for this citation and the following citations from the Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, the archivist could not supply the precise file).

¹²⁵ Correspondence from Major E.D.B. Kippen to the Jewish Community Council of Montreal, Inc., 19 September 1940, CJC-ZA1940 Box 7, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

which they would do their best to fulfill.¹²⁷ From these correspondences two things are clear. First, that Jewish organizations were working hard to support the refugees religiously, helping them to keep the cultural community of the camps alive and enabling them to practice as they would outside the camps. Second, that the camps commandants were *cooperating* with such organizations. Congregations, such as the Congregation Shaar Hashomayim, were also supportive of the Jewish refugees because as seen from a letter dated August 29, 1940, they were sending over prayer books to the Jewish internees who at the time were labelled as prisoners of war.¹²⁸

In regards to their schooling, several organizations provided supplies for the men. Working under the YMCA umbrella were representative of the World Student Christian Federation and the European Student Relief Fund (ESRF). Recreational equipment, books, films, art supplies, musical instruments, and Christian religious items were provided. Funds for the programs often came from the UJRA.

Then, during their testimonies, Edgar L recalled that the CJC provided school supplies¹²⁹ while Leo K recalled the help of the YMCA and the Quakers who supplied the men with textbooks, pens, paper and other provisions.¹³⁰

Overall, the works of these people and organizations cannot be understated. Their efforts supplied the men with important articles, religious and educational, which allowed these men to make the best of their situation. As stated already, many of the refugees were educated professionals who took it upon themselves to share their knowledge. Therefore, in this sense, the internees themselves transformed their experiences in internment into a lively, cultural and

¹²⁷ Correspondence from the Jewish Community Council of Montreal to Major E.D.B. Kippen, 23 September 1940, CJC-ZA1940 Box 7, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹²⁸ Correspondence from the Congregation Shaar Hashomayim to the Jewish Community Council (Mr. M. Peters), 29 August 1940, CJC-ZA1940 Box 7, Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives, Montreal.

¹²⁹ Oral testimony, interview of Edgar L., interviewed by Rhona Vandelman, Montreal, 2012; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-471.

¹³⁰ Oral testimony, interview of Leo K., interviewed by Barry Stallman, Montreal, 2007; part of the Witness to History Collection of the Montreal Holocaust Museum, identifier: WTH-516.

supportive community. However, this process was supported and fostered by these organizations, which therefore sparks the question of if and how the experience of internment would have panned out differently without the help and support of these organizations and representatives.

Through the predominant use of various primary sources including newspapers, archive documents, oral testimonies by ex-internees, and memoirs, this paper has analyzed the internment of Jewish refugees in Canada from 1940 to 1943. This paper has argued that these Jewish internees, in the face of oppression, created lively, cultural and supportive camp communities, making the best of the time that they were interned within Canada through their resistance against internment, religious persistence, intellectual determination, and comradery. These men, even though interned, continued to live their lives with as much normalcy and productivity as they possibly could, practicing their religion and completing their studies as they would if they were not interned. This paper has also analyzed that solidarity was present within the camps as the Jewish organizations *beyond* the barbed wires provided the means needed to enable the Jewish refugees to make the best of their situation. In doing so, this paper has provided context as to why these innocent refugees were interned and shipped to Canada.

Biographical Notes

Sarah Zimbalatti is a fifth-year undergraduate student at York University pursuing her Specialized Honours BA in History. In her fourth-year of university, Sarah completed her first-year of the Concurrent Education program at York University, and will complete her second and final year of this program next year in 2022, graduating as an Ontario Certified Teacher. Throughout her university career, Sarah has accumulated an extensive knowledge of history that she aspires to share in her classroom.

